DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 639 SP 040 480

AUTHOR Moffett, David
TITLE Using the Internet To Enhance Student Teaching and Field Experiences.
PUB DATE 2001-10-24
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, October 24-27, 2001).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Method (Teaching Technique); *Computer Uses in Education; Electronic Mail; Elementary Secondary Education; Feedback; *Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; *Internet; Online Courses; Preservice Teacher Education; *Student Teaching; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how the Internet was used in one preservice teacher education program to enhance field experiences and student teaching. It examines how the professor helped cohorts of field students and student teachers to continue their rich discussions beyond seminars (via online discussions and message boards); how he was able to use challenges faced by specific students as clinical case studies for all students across the program; how the student teacher program was able to shift from large-group debriefings, where typically a minority of students participated, to a place where everyone shared; how he provided more timely feedback regarding students' reflective journals and spent more time observing and less time reading while supervising; and how he was able to use the experiences of the current field students and student teachers as exemplars that would be available to future field and student teachers. The paper concludes that student experiences in the field can be enhanced by using communications software on the Internet. (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
David Moffett
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Midwestern Education Research Association (MWERA), Annual Conference, Chicago, October, 2001

ED 461 639

USING THE INTERNET TO ENHANCE STUDENT TEACHING AND FIELD EXPERIENCES

Dr. David Moffett
College of Mount Saint Joseph
Cincinnati, Ohio

Introduction

In the spirit of aligning education research with NCATE 2000 Standards, my research is focused on discovering and understanding the "variables and forces that either facilitate or impede the learning process." 1

Technological innovations cause me to invest a portion of my Unit research on how the Internet affects the teaching and learning process. This paper is a preliminary report of my findings on using the Internet to enhance field experiences and student teaching.

During the past four years I have created, designed, and launched several online courses using a variety of software delivery platforms. Each semester new techniques and methods emerge in my online efforts, informed by informal assessment, formal assessment, reflective practice, and evaluative feedback.

The initial results of my online efforts in enhancing field and student teaching experiences are so new that I find myself in the early stages of contemplating how best to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate the new data.

My plan is to share research design and outcomes in future presentations, over the next many years, as I continue to experiment with online teaching and learning techniques that enhance the learning process.

At this early stage of my research I wish to focus on the initial outcomes of my

SP046180

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

attempts and share such data with interested parties. The preliminary results of my efforts to enhance real-time teaching and learning with supplemental online activity are exciting to me.

It is my goal and intent to share my findings in such a manner that readers also become excited about the findings.

Enhancing Traditional Field and Student Teacher Programs

A typically good student teaching and field experience program provides education students with relevant on-campus seminars, formative and summative observational feedback through college supervisors and cooperating teachers, and opportunities to reflect on beginning practice.

Offering vital seminars and providing formative, diagnostic, and summative feedback are important ingredients in effective programs but many of the problems and challenges faced by student teachers and field students go beyond the anticipated outcomes of even the best intended program designs.

Technology provides us with the option of providing more lines of communication among the students, college supervisors, cooperating teachers, and ancillary faculty. I wish to share important information about how the Internet can be used to enhance field and student teaching experiences.

My supervisory experiences over the past six years have included conducting scores of seminars and personally supervising 100 student teachers and field students. I have conducted 600 formal observations, offered formative narrative evaluations, written thousands of remarks in reflective journals, provided summative evaluations, and of course written many letters of recommendation.

In my first year of supervising in 1995, I would read student reflections during the on-site observation and discuss the experience with the student and the cooperating teacher. A lot of my time was spent on contacting students to arrange for observations.

Reflecting on my first year of supervising, I decided to require students to send me weekly faxes of their schedules either on Sunday nights or early each Monday morning. This helped me be more efficient in scheduling and allowed me to invest time in other academic matters.

After my second year of university supervision I was asked to teach the capstone supervision and evaluation course in a Principal's Licensing program at a Research I Institution. This experience provided additional data for reflection.

Years three and four of clinical supervision realized basically the same approaches as previous years but with the added feature of students having direct cellular phone access to me. I would conduct seminars, receive students' weekly schedule faxes, plan my observation schedules, travel to schools, observe, counsel with students and teachers, read their reflective journal, write evaluations and remarks in the journals, and make myself available for clinical surprises and emergencies in the field.

Reflecting on the first several years of my supervising, I decided that I needed to enhance lines of communication and be more efficient and effective in my observations. Many questions came to mind:

How could I cause the cohorts of field students and student teachers to continue their rich discussions beyond the seminars?

How could I use the challenges particular students faced as clinical case studies for all of my students across the program?

How could our student teacher program shift from large-group debriefings, where typically a minority of students participated, to a place where everyone shares?

How could I provide more timely feedback regarding student reflective journals and spend more time observing and less time reading while supervising?

How could I cause the experiences of the current field students and student teachers to become legacies or exemplars and available to future field and student teachers?

These are my current answers to the questions I've asked:

Continuing Discussions Beyond The Student Teaching and Field Experience Seminars

We all have online opportunities to launch web communities, at no cost, which sustain and enhance rich dialogue among students in field experiences and student teaching. Of the 2,130 web communities classified under "Teaching" in the particular provider I'm using, our web community is currently the most active.

Students across the several levels of the program interact with each other asynchronously on a virtual message board. Here are some examples of student and instructor generated titles therein:

Talking to students about 9/11
"B" Average Needed To Teach
Junk Food in the Schools
CLASSROOM CONTROL
respect towards authority
Chris's Social Studies Links
Kati's Special Ed Links
Connie's IEC Links
Aaron's PE Links
Maisha's Special Education Links
Kyle's Social Studies Links
Grouping Students By Ability
Will You Teach?
Become a Teacher in just FOUR WEEKS!
Mindy's Middle Childhood Links
School: place or concept?
My Practicum Expectations
My Practicum Expectations

Students and faculty click on discussion topics of interest, read replies, and post thoughtful replies. Students report they feel more freedom in the online discussions to express their opinions and views. Often students who participate least in real-time settings participate most online.

Students also report using online Message Boards to supplement real-time conversations requires a lot of work. In order to exist in a virtual web community a member must read postings and provide replies. In online interactive web communities and message boards, students cannot be passive and disengaged learners like they sometimes are in real-time settings. Online, students must be active learners.

Our college is investing considerable time and energy in providing wireless laptop computers to students. Already, half of our traditional students are equipped with laptops that can access the Internet without wires anywhere on campus. In two years all traditional students will be toting such wireless devices.

I have found that constructing e-mail listservs for each of my courses is helpful in guiding students to particular Message Boards and discussion topics. When an important topic is posted I send an e-mail alert advising students to go to a particular place in the web community.

I've also discovered that students need to be initially required to join the web communities, post discussions, and provide replies to get them in the habit of being active students in the virtual classroom environment.

Using Challenges Particular to Students as Clinical Supervision Case Studies

Practicum students are required to post their expectations for the experience.

Students from across all levels of the program read these postings and often provide replies.

First and second year education majors are eager to hear about what it is like in the practicum and student teaching trenches, especially if the information is being offered by their peers.

While the education neophytes do experience a number of field observation opportunities early in the program, they are curious about what it is like to actually teach.

Here are examples of Practicum reflective postings:

"I would call my practicum experience excellent but I would call it interesting. I attended my first team meeting, and it wasn't exactly what I thought it would be. To sum it up without giving out much information including names, the teachers are very frustrated with the time table for the proficiency tests, and they are getting no help from the administration above them. Individually, my teacher is excellent, and I should be able to learn a great deal from her." 2

"My teacher is also a middle school athletic director and he is also a cross country coach at a local high school. All good ways for me to get my name around but my teaching experience sucks! This gentlemen is the most unorganized person I have ever met. Today he let me stand up in front of class, which was nice, but it was because his cross country team is going to a meet this week and he is now just finding transportation and lodging (today is Wed by the way). He is frantic and is frankly very annoying. I asked him to make copies of my introduction letter to the class so I could pass them out and not only didn't the copies not get made, he flat lost the damn thing. I wouldn't be surprised if he lost his red folder with his pay sheet. Either way this man is by far the worst teacher I have ever encountered. Here is his teaching strategy. I make overhead, you take notes, you read text book, you do questions in book for homework, take test. SOME TEACHER. It is also very intimidating looking at what I will be faced with when I teach as the two days I have been there the students will not do their homework, and this is no understatement. As an example today in my first World Cultures 8th grade class 12 out of 25 did their homework. In the second class I will teach only 1 out of 30 did it! He then just gives all those students zero in the book, tells them that they have to turn it in tomorrow for zero credit but if they do not do it he will just write a referral and they will spend a weekend in I.S.S. Some motivator! I guess I am just frustrated, the kids hate the class and so do I. I did get up in front of both classes and talked about my goals and expectations for them. Some seemed very motivated and interested while other seemed that they could care less. I then asked the class to go around and introduce

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

themselves to me and to please tell me something they liked about school and something they would change about school if they could. I would say 90% of students said they like NOTHING about school and the only things they would change about school would be lunch, gum in class and shorter days. Tomorrow I am assigning them to write a one page paper entitled my exciting life. Hopefully I can find out some information to make learning seem authentic or worth while to them.
I have great energy in class and they seem to be happily amused that it seems I do care about them. Hopefully they will continue to open up. I had a line of about 5 students waiting to talk about computers, cars, and football after class. My cooperating teacher is a nice guy, he just seems to have way too much to handle and not enough time to care about the students. I made a list of 10 things that I would need in order to help me write my paper on Friday and I have not gotten one piece of info from him. When he takes role for class he doesn't even know some of the students names. AMAZING! I made my own seating chart and had a student help me fill in the chart and I already know at least half the classes. LAME-O. Anyways I am sure I will make the best out of it. Due to his very busy schedule he has given me the freedom to do about anything and about anytime I feel ready. Now the only thing I need is a text book. See you all Friday." 3

Another Practicum student replied to this student by sharing her experience:

"I think I feel your pain. I think I may even be in a similar situation. We should talk! You sound a little worse off than I do, but I think we can both try and make the best of it. Here is my story. I wasn't sure what grade I had because we didn't find out in class (no biggie) so I looked at the students and asked if it was a 7th grade. I thought that because they looked younger than my 8th graders from last semester. I got a strong yes, followed by, "this is the most immature bunch of 7th graders I have ever seen, just watch!" I figured I would just blow that comment off and see where things went. After all the kids had not even finished walking into the room. Then the routine started. Take out your assignment books, write the next 3 assignments. Now lets review the date. Do we all know what 9-17 means? Apparently not everyone does because someone thought it was the chapters we had to read. Now, of course every day we review the date. I'll share my thoughts on that more in class. So the kids get some review sheets and work on filling them out because there is a test tomorrow. I asked about the lesson plans and the COS. I got the textbook binder of worksheets! I was scared that this was going to be one of those "ditto" classes as others have called them. Today (Thursday) was an improvement because there was some class discussion. I also got my teacher handbook, printed out by the office staff. The teacher and even her neighbor teacher did not have them. They laughed when I said I wanted it and said no one reads them. I guess they are on the network which is perceived by those two teachers as "they don't give them to us anymore." Of course I sweetly commented, "so all you have to do is print them out, right?" Today I also got the lesson plan binder, most lessons are dated 1996 and 1997. We'll have to see what happens. See you aren't the only one." 4

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Occasionally students new to the Message Boards make the mistake of wanting other students to divulge names of schools and teachers. For example:

"My first practicum experience was definitely two thumbs up . I am at a brand new school with state of the art everything. The teachers are very nice and have let me begin to participate in class activities. I am learning a lot and hopefully the entire experience will be as good as my first day. As for the others with a "LAMO-O" experience, keep a positive attitude. It could get better. Good luck and keep us posted. By the way, do you mind sharing where this LAME-O school is and its name. I wouldn't mind knowing for future reference." 5

My online reply to the student and the 199 other members of the community:

"We aren't supposed to divulge school names, teacher names, etc. when we're talking about our field experiences. As basic, applied, qualitative, quantitative, and/or action researchers, we must protect the identities of people and particular places. It's better to focus on the issues that are being discussed. 6

Promoting the Sharing Of Student Teaching and Field Experiences

There is currently a broad range of use of Message Boards, used to break through the usual time/space learning and teaching continuum, among faculty in our Unit. My Practicum students and the students I supervise in Student Teaching respond to suggested requirements of Message Board use with enthusiasm.

Practicum students post initial expectations, early experiences, and ongoing weekly reflections over twelve week periods. Students beyond the particular experience post replies and questions.

Student teachers share weekly reflections that are syntheses of their daily written reflections. They return to the Message Board often to answer questions about their postings. They are viewed as the senior members on the Message Boards and their opinions and suggestions are valued by students who haven't yet experienced such

culminating program experiences.

Students have begun to replicate the web communities I've constructed by creating communities with Message Boards of their own. Two student teachers, with my assistance, have launched online portfolios utilizing this technology. They are talking about how they created their online portfolios with peers on the Message Board.

In addition to practicum students and student teachers sharing field experiences, they are learning how to launch and manage Message Boards from each other and taking the online sharing experiences to new levels.

Timely Journal Feedback and More Observation Time

Students are still required to keep daily reflective journals. Since students naturally have laptop computers at our college, many of the field students are now writing their reflections on their computers.

Besides e-mailing their reflections to me once they are in the college's wireless environment they also often decide to post reflections in the Message Boards. I am now able to provide formative, diagnostic, and summative feedback regarding students' reflections in the presence of the online learning community on the Message Boards. Additional perspectives and reactions are posted by students and fellow faculty.

Not only am I able to devote more observation time to observing, the process of students posting reflections on the Message Board is encouraging collaborative dialogue among students and faculty.

Creating Student Teacher and Field Experience Legacies For Future Field Students

One of the many attractive features of the online web communities I use is that

postings by students can remain on the Message Boards as long as necessary.

Fifty conversations appear on each page of a Message Board. By simply clicking to previous discussions archives can be pulled up from years past. This design effectively creates student legacies. Students of today and the future in our Unit can revisit practicum and student teaching experiences and reflections from the past and study and learn from them.

As a Unit, we can also look back on our programs and contemplate trends and strategies for improvement. All in all these records of experiences past seem extremely valuable for our students and our Unit's life.

Summary

As I continue to reflect upon and evaluate my ongoing attempts of enhancing field and student teaching experiences utilizing the Internet, I will report on new techniques and methods implemented that seem to best facilitate the learning process.

I will also continue to share collected data and discuss ways of assessing the merit and worth of the endeavor in subsequent reports. With excitement, I am pleased to report that initial data does appear to support my assertion that student experiences in the field can be enhanced by utilizing communications software on the Internet.

Online conversations among all members of the learning community break through the usual real-time learning constraints. I believe that all education community members across teacher education Units will one day collaborate and learn via such teaching and learning delivery systems. Imagine the possibilities of collaborating and learning about field and student teaching experiences at any time, from any place, anywhere. The possibilities for enhancing such programs using this technique seem endless.

References

1 Dottin, Erskine S., The Development of a Conceptual Framework: The Stimulation for Coherence and Continuous Improvement in Teacher Education, p. 42, University Press of America, New York, 2001.

2 Message Posting, General Message Board, College of Mount Saint Joseph Education Program Private Web Community, Cincinnati, 2001.

3 ibid.

4 ibid.

5 ibid.

6 ibid.